



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



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Educational and Cultural Exchanges

The really crucial link in the international communications chain is the last three feet, which is best bridged by personal contact, one person talking to another.

-Edward R. Murrow, Director, United States Information Agency

Murrow's words of more than 40 years ago still ring true today: there is no substitute for direct, face-to-face contact between people of different cultures to break through stereotypes, recognize common values and overcome differences. Consequently, educational and cultural exchange programs, which bring people together in an intensive manner, have been called the crown jewels of public diplomacy.

Over the years, thousands of Indians have traveled to the United States on U.S. State Department-sponsored exchange programs. They have engaged not only in study, teaching, research and performance, but participated in home stays, community service projects and internships in order to gain a deeper understanding of American society. Many, on their return to India, eventually moved into positions of influence and dedicated a part of their lives, or the whole of their lives, to helping others. There are dozens of such examples in the Exchange Visitors Alumni Association, now headed by Janaki Murali of Bangalore.

Goli Ameri, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and

Cultural Affairs, traveled to Bangalore August 19-21 to, among other things, engage Ms. Murali and her fellow exchange alumni. Ms. Ameri noted that she too benefited from international exchange. Iranian born and reared, she recalled that she was one of 100,000 international students who went to the United States to study in 1974. Today the United States hosts approximately 600,000 foreign students, of which the largest national contingent is Indian.



Indian exchange grantees in Bangalore with Fulbright Scholar/Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus (in pale blue kurta) and Assistant Secretary Goli Ameri (fourth from right)

Arts-based and sports-based exchanges have also played a long and positive role in building relationships between Indians and Americans. Hardly a day goes by without musicians, dancers, actors, writers, artists and athletic coaches traveling from one country to the other to work with counterparts. Participants often interact with hundreds of people in the other country, experience the culture directly and on its own terms, and form lasting friendships.

Experience has proved Murrow to be right: in the last three feet, when people are at touching distance from one another, assumptions fall away and one's humanity cannot be denied. That is why educational and cultural exchanges not only foster mutual understanding, but promote peace. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who in 1956 conceived the international "People-to-People Programs," saw the potential of such programs as limitless, saying, "If only people will get together, then so eventually will nations."

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I have found that one of the best parts of my new job is to travel around South India. In my first few weeks in country, I have been to Thiruvananthapuram and Bangalore, two great capital cities with distinctive and appealing qualities. I hope to travel much more in the coming months. As a consular officer, I have been focused throughout my career in the State Department on movements of people to and from the United States. I have always felt that such travel offers the best opportunities to promote intercultural awareness and friendships, to the benefit of both the traveler and the people of the receiving country. Therefore, it is especially gratifying for me to serve here in South India, where there is so much growth in personal contacts and exchanges of all kinds. In addition to the explosive growth in travel from India to the United States (as measured by visa volume and by numbers of international flights), we are seeing a strong trend of more people coming from the U.S. to India. We are very interested in promoting travel in both directions, involving tourism, business, and especially international students.

- Andrew T. Simkin, Consul General

American Library Traveling Exhibitions

The American Library – with its 14,000 books, 140 scholarly journals, electronic databases and much more – is housed at the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai. Its extensive resources, however, are available to Library members all over South India via mail, telephone, fax and email. In August and September, Library and other Consulate personnel traveled to Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikode and Dharwad to let people know that there is no better place than the American Library for accurate and up-to-date information on the United States, whether one's interests are government policies or American history, politics, culture, economy or literature.



Eli Yamin (left) and friends in Thiruvananthapuram

The traveling exhibitions included book displays, poster shows, video screenings, quiz contests for students, and presentations by the United States-India Educational Foundation on higher education. If one had to pick a highlight, though, it was without doubt the teaming up in Thiruvananthapuram of the renowned Eli Yamin Quartet with Indian musicians P. Unnikrishnan, Anil Srinivasan and B.S. Purushotham. The crowd was enthralled by the American jazz-Carnatic classical fusion.

American Corner-Bangalore at Age Four

On September 23, Consul General Andrew Simkin and Mr. N. Ramanuja, Chairman of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, inaugurated the fourth anniversary celebration of the American Corner-Bangalore. The Corner is “a window on the United States” for residents of Bangalore who make use of the Corner's book and periodical collections, access its on-line and off-line databases, and attend seminars and group discussions on a range of American-focused topics.



Consul General Andrew Simkin and Mr. N. Ramanuja, Chairman of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, meet patrons at the American Corner-Bangalore

The American Corner was established in partnership with and is co-located with the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan whose state-of-the-art auditorium, library, classrooms and educational and cultural programs attract students and the general public from all over the state of Karnataka. Visitors to the American Corner are always welcome, whether they are serious scholars, students investigating educational opportunities in the United States or casual readers just wishing to browse.

Positive Images



Consulate employees spend Saturday, September 20, working on housing for 22 families in Ennore as part of a Habitat for Humanity project



Vice Consul Michelle Wildman (above), along with 32 of her American and Indian colleagues, give “the gift of life,” a blood donation, on the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks



Consul General and Mrs. Simkin arrive at the Chennai Central Railway Station on August 21 to take up their new posting

The Whale

How can a single actor with a handful of props embody one of America's greatest and most complex novels, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*? Actor/dancer Carlo Adinolfi and director Renee Philippi somehow succeeded in the task to the delight of audiences at the MetroPlus Theatre Fest 2008 in Chennai, at Ranga Shankara in Bangalore and in theatres elsewhere in India and Sri Lanka.

In a talkback session with audience members following the first performance of "The Whale" on August 7, Mr. Adinolfi explained that he had long been "obsessed" with *Moby Dick* and its



Renee Philippi looks on as Carlo Adinolfi addresses audience members following a performance in Chennai

themes of man's struggle for identity and a place in the universe. After meeting Ms. Philippi, the two of them figured out how to adapt the novel for the stage, using Mr. Adinolfi's extraordinary voice and physicality to play the narrator Ishmael, the tyrannical and obsessed Captain Ahab and even the great white whale itself. Mr. Adinolfi, formerly a stage carpenter, was aided by the ingenious props that he had crafted.

When not on stage, Mr. Adinolfi and Ms. Philippi conducted voice and movement workshops for both students and professional actors. In sessions at Ethiraj College and Women's Christian College in Chennai, the actor and the director reveled in interacting with eager students and spreading the message of self-expression. And in departing India, much too soon in their view, Mr. Adinolfi and Ms. Philippi asked one question: "When will you invite us back?"

Consular Corner

U.S. a Popular Destination for Indian Travelers

Perhaps the best indicator of the evolving state of Indo-U.S. relations is the large and growing throngs of Indians applying for visas to travel to the United States. The numbers increase each year in parallel with a growth in the trade of goods and services, in investment, in programs of cooperation of all kinds, and in people-to-people relationships.

As a result of these deepening ties, the demand for visas for people living in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu has seen an unprecedented growth in the last ten years. In 1998 almost 79,000 people applied in Chennai for visas to visit the United States. In 2007, 237,306 visa applications were processed in Chennai, a three-fold increase.

To put this in perspective, we issued enough visas in 2007 to fill more than 452 fully loaded Airbus 380s, the largest passenger airplane in the world. We could have instead filled 3,295 Indian sleeper-class train cars or 5,273 inter-city buses. If we were to stack all of our visa applications from 2007, we would have a pile of paper 396 feet high. Placed end to end, the paper trail would be 165 miles long. (Fortunately, we are using more electronics and becoming less paper-dependent.)

About half of the visas we issue are for tourists or business people going for trips of less than six months. The other half are people headed for longer periods, including about 54,000 H-1B temporary workers and family members, about 34,000 L visa applicants and family members transferring within their companies, and about 13,000 students.

To help satisfy this increased demand, we will soon open a new Consulate in Hyderabad. In 2008 we are expecting to see an even larger number of visa applications, and the growth will likely continue into the foreseeable future, emphasizing the truly all-encompassing partnership between India and the United States.

What We Read

Frederick J. Kaplan
Consul for Public Affairs

In an Antique Land
by Amitav Ghosh



Using the actual correspondence of one Abraham Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant who lived in Mangalore in the 12th Century, Ghosh tells a fascinating tale of diverse cultures brought together by Indian-Arabian trade routes. The letters, mostly between Ben Yiju and his slave in Aden, were discovered in a chamber ("geniza") of a Cairo synagogue nearly 800 years after they had been written. Ghosh interweaves the story of Ben Yiju with his own experiences as a social anthropologist living among the fellaheen in the Nile Delta in the 1980s. Ghosh, like Ben Yiju, was a stranger in an antique land.

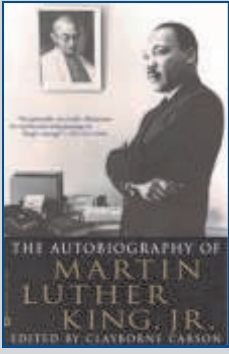
Anjana Modi
Vice Consul

Unaccustomed Earth
by Jhumpa Lahiri



This compilation of short stories contains eight emotion-filled tales of Bengali immigrants and their American-born children striving to acculturate. The book's title is taken from Nathaniel Hawthorne's advice to his children not to remain "in the same worn-out soil" but to "strike their roots into unaccustomed earth." While the stories will certainly strike a chord with Indian-American readers, readers living in India may find the characters' experiences just as familiar – especially the generational tensions that arise as children endeavor to become independent and struggle to meet family expectations.

Gandhi and King



Of the thousands of photographs he had to choose from for the cover of “The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” editor Clayborne Carson picked one of King standing in his office with a framed portrait of Mahatma Gandhi on the wall behind him. King’s widow, Coretta Scott King, approved the choice. The reason was simple: King, a firm believer in nonviolence, was guided by Gandhi’s example.

Dr. Carson (at right), a history professor at Stanford University, visited Chennai and Madurai September 15-17 in part to retrace the steps that Dr. and Mrs. King took half a century ago when they traveled throughout India. Like King, Dr. Carson spoke at the Gandhi Memorial Museum in Madurai. His subject was the same as King’s: how India’s Freedom Struggle and its novel use of nonviolent action as a method in that struggle provided a model for civil rights activists in the United States. At the end of Dr. Carson’s presentation, an audience member spontaneously sang “We Shall Overcome” in English and Tamil.



In Dr. Carson’s view, Indians, African-Americans and a majority of humanity were part of the same great struggle of the 20th Century – to ensure that all people, irrespective of the color of their skin, their station in life, or the wealth and power of their community, enjoyed the right to vote and other basic citizenship rights that at the beginning of the century were the preserve of a privileged few.



Dr. Walter Fluker (at left), professor of leadership studies at Morehouse College, King’s alma mater, visited Chennai and Sriperumbudur September 18-19 to discuss “The importance of ethical leadership for a democracy: How will we make or find the Gandhis and Kings of this generation?” He told students and faculty at the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development that effective leaders are able to balance their competitive nature with larger community values like justice and equity. Leadership, Dr. Fluker said, is not about privilege and position, but about influencing others, as Gandhi and King had done, for the common good. Asked what leader influenced him most in his own life, Dr. Fluker did not hesitate to answer: it was his mother.

Experience America in South India

Over a period of ten days in early September, American officers from the Embassy and Consulates fanned out across India to learn more about the country and to tell America’s story about higher education, environmental awareness, elections and the growing Indo-U.S. partnership in health, energy and many other areas.

In South India alone, in places like Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Puducherry, Annamalai Nagar, Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, Mangalore, Manipal and Mysore, American officers spoke at colleges and universities, madrasahs, business chambers, bar associations, nongovernmental organizations and city corporation offices, reaching nearly 9,000 people face to face. The effect of their interactions was multiplied by wide coverage in the English and vernacular media.

The purpose of this undertaking was not only to talk, but to listen to people’s questions and concerns. Students wanted to know how to choose where to study in the



Vice Consul Stetson Sanders chats with a student of Maradur Jain College, Vaniyambadi

United States and how to pay for their education abroad. There were lively debates about climate change and programs and policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Many people asked how the outcome of U.S. elections might affect India. There was intense curiosity about the broad range of activities in which Indians and Americans are jointly engaged.

All in all, what emerged was that even in second-tier cities there is a strong sense of connection to the United States and a recognition of common values, common interests and a common destiny that bind together two nations on opposite sides of the globe. The warm reception given to the American officers who ventured forth will encourage them to take many more such trips in the future.

In Memoriam



The employees of the American Consulate General-Chennai mourn the loss of Ramamurthy Sambandan, a colleague for the last 26 years, who passed away suddenly on August 23. He will be deeply missed by his wife, mother, three children and his many friends at the Consulate.